

Learning About LATCH

The New Way to Install a Car Seat

**Child
Safety
Facts**
2005

LATCH (Lower **A**nchors and **T**ethers for **C**hildren) is the new way to install children's car seats in motor vehicles. It uses special fittings instead of a seat belt to install a car seat. It can make tight car seat installation easier in many, but not all, vehicles. It is called the Universal Anchorage System in Canada and ISOFIX in Europe.

It has two parts (see picture, right):

1. **On car seats:** Upper and lower attachments are on most car seats made after September 1, 2002.

Most are straps with connectors. A few models have lower LATCH connectors on the frame of the car seat base. Some car seat makers offer lower LATCH straps that can be used for certain older models.

Upper (tether) straps have been sold with forward-facing car seats for several years. Tether strap kits are also available for many older models.

2. **In vehicles:** All 2003 and later model year vehicles and many 2001–02 models come with upper and lower LATCH anchors. Upper anchors (tether anchors) have been required in most cars since 2000.

What is the LATCH System in a vehicle?

Check the vehicle owner's manual for locations of LATCH anchors. Many also are marked with the symbols shown below.

- **One upper (tether) anchor:** a bar, bracket, or webbing strap located behind the seat. It may be marked with a tether anchor symbol (right). Tether anchors are in different places in different models.

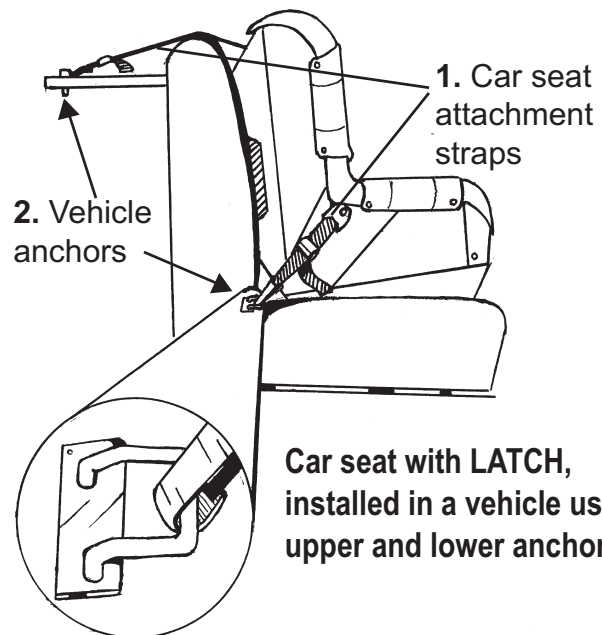


*Upper LATCH
(tether) anchor
symbol*

- **Two lower anchors:** a pair of small metal bars located where the lower seat cushion meets the seat back. They may be placed up to 3 inches behind the cushion. Hidden anchors are marked with a small round symbol on the seatback (right). A few vehicles have small tags, which also may say "ISOFIX".



*Lower LATCH
anchor symbol*



**Car seat with LATCH,
installed in a vehicle using
upper and lower anchors**

New cars, vans, pickup trucks, and SUVs must have lower and upper LATCH anchors in at least two rear seating positions. A third position must have a tether anchor to use when installing a car seat with the seat belt. Vans must have at least one LATCH position in the second row of seats.

A few vehicles have lower LATCH anchors in the center rear. If there are no lower anchors there, use the seat belt in that position (see page 2).

Basics of Using LATCH

Always read and follow manufacturers' instructions for both the car seat **and** the vehicle.

Always tighten LATCH attachments after connecting them to the anchors in the vehicle. Tighten the lower straps first in most cases.

Use the seat belt if the LATCH system does not hold the car seat tightly. Not all LATCH anchors work well with every LATCH car seat.

Do not use the inner bars of the side lower anchors to install a car seat in the center position unless both the vehicle manual **and** the car seat instructions allow it. If it is not allowed, use the seat belt in the center instead.

Never attach two car seats to one LATCH anchor.

Use add-on LATCH straps only for the specific car seat models listed by the maker.

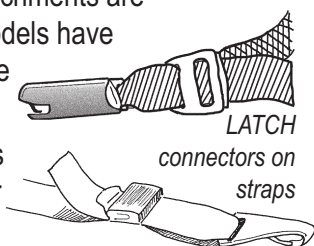
*Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride*



What is the LATCH System on a car seat?

Lower attachments hook or push onto the anchor bars. On most car seats, the attachments are straps with connectors. A few models have rigid connectors built into the base of the car seat.

The **upper (tether) strap** has a hook that connects to the upper anchor.



LATCH on different types of car seats

- **Rear-facing infant car seats:** Only lower attachments are required (no tether).

Those with separate bases must have lower attachments on the base. The car seat itself can be installed separately with a seat belt or a LATCH retrofit kit.

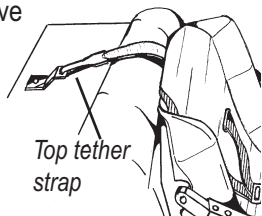
- **Convertible car seats (rear-facing and forward-facing):**

In the rear-facing position, most use only the lower attachments. Do not use the tether strap unless the instructions say that is okay.

In the forward-facing position, car seats use both the lower attachments and the tether.

- **Forward-facing car seats:** Most have top tethers (right) as well as lower attachments.

- **“Combination” car seat/boosters with a removable harness:** can be used as a car seat or booster; use LATCH only when the harness is used to hold the child.



- **Car beds, booster seats, vests, and car seats for children over 48 pounds** are not required to have LATCH. Use seat belts instead. (Check instructions for more information.)

Questions about LATCH

Can I use LATCH to put a car seat in the center?

If your vehicle does not have a pair of lower LATCH anchors for the center rear, use the seat belt in that position. If you cannot get a tight installation with the seat belt (and tether), try using a side seating position with LATCH.

Do **NOT** use the inner bars of the side lower anchors to install a car seat in the center, unless the vehicle owner's manual and car seat instructions state that this is okay.

Can LATCH be used for children over 40 pounds?

LATCH anchors are made for children up to about 48 pounds. Makers of products for heavier children say that

their seats should be installed using the vehicle seat belt and tether when children are over 48 to 50 pounds. Check the car seat instructions and the vehicle owner's manual.

My old car seat does not have LATCH. Is it unsafe?

No. All car seats must meet the same standard. Those without LATCH protect well when they are used properly. Continue to use your child's current car seat if it can be installed tightly with the seat belt.

It is hard to install a car seat tightly with a seat belt in many vehicles. See the vehicle manual and car seat instructions about locking the seat belt. Using a tether can help. Check for tight installation by pulling the base of the seat toward the front of the vehicle and from side to side. It should not move more than 1 inch. **You do not need to use superhuman force to tighten the belt.**

Can I install a LATCH car seat with a seat belt?

Yes. New car seats can be used in older vehicles using seat belts. Even in a LATCH car, you may find that you can get a tighter fit with the seat belt than with LATCH. It is okay to use the seat belt.

Can I use an older car seat in a LATCH vehicle?

Yes. Many car seat makers offer retrofit kits for lower LATCH attachment and tethers. Use only the right kit for your car seat model.

Should I use LATCH attachments when the car seat is being used as a booster?

LATCH is used for car seats that have a harness. Some car seats called “combination seats” come with LATCH and a removable harness for children under 40 pounds. Use LATCH when the harness is in use. When the child is over 40 pounds and uses it as a booster with a lap-shoulder belt, most manufacturers recommend not using the lower attachments and tether strap.

Should LATCH anchors be replaced after a crash?

Tell your insurance agent if LATCH anchors have been used in a crash. The anchors should be inspected and replaced if they are damaged.

Resources

- NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 888-DASH-2-DOT; 800-424-9153 (tty); www.nhtsa.dot.gov
- SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-SAFE (7233); Spanish, 800-747-SANO (7266); www.carseat.org
- Finding a car seat inspection station near you: www.seatcheck.org or 866-SEATCHECK (732-8243)